



Congresswoman Stephanie Murphy
Remarks as Prepared for Delivery
Interfaith Council MLK Day Event
January 7, 2018

Good evening. I'm Congresswoman Stephanie Murphy. It is my honor to serve as your voice in our nation's capital, and it is my privilege to join you all here tonight.

Thank you to the executive committee of the Interfaith Council of Central Florida for inviting me to speak and to Rev. Stephens and Rev. Fulwider for being here tonight.

I also want to thank Rev. Williams—and his entire congregation—for hosting this very special event.

And to everyone here tonight, thank you for the work you do in our community. Whether you are a leader of faith, a public servant, an extraordinary citizen, or all of the above—thank you.

I am inspired by your actions. We are a better, stronger, and more inclusive community because of your work.

Our purpose today is unity, inspired by the life and work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Our quest is opportunity, rooted in equality and perseverance.

And our mission is love, motivated by hope and guided by faith.

I know in today's environment, unity is a challenging purpose and love seems an impossible mission. Not to mention opportunity seems harder to find year by year.

But, you would not be here tonight—representing your respective faiths—if you did not believe in the importance of these goals in our community.

When I reflect on the challenges facing our country today, it reminds me of the joke about the optimist and the pessimist.

The pessimist says, "Oh my gosh, things are terrible. They can't possibly get any worse."

And, the optimist responds, "Oh yes they can!"

No matter the challenges ahead, we must never abandon our purpose of unity.

We must never give up on our mission to love.

And we must always continue our quest toward equality and opportunity.

These objectives guided Dr. King's work, and they define his legacy.

There are times in the history of America where unity and love were hard to find—and where opportunities were unfairly denied to too many Americans or aspiring Americans.

Unfortunately, we face many of those same obstacles today. Yes, we have improved dramatically in many areas, but we continue to fall short in others.

It is these core principles of equality, liberty, and opportunity that define America's greatness, which is why when these principles are threatened, so is our country's greatness.

That's why America's greatness depends on more than simply guarding our individual rights; it depends on us consistently working together to strengthen those rights for every American.

In fact, it was Dr. King who put it best.

"The ultimate measure of a man," he said, "is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy."

We are certainly at the crossroads of challenge and controversy in America today. And our democracy is being tested like never before.

Too many Americans are seeing their rights rolled back.

Special interests are spending unlimited, untraceable amounts of money in our political process.

Foreign adversaries are using cyberattacks to influence the outcome of our elections.

Severe partisanship here at home is getting worse, and our free press is under attack.

Not to mention we face growing unrest from places like the Middle East and North Korea.

In these trying times, it is up to us to stand up and speak out.

We must lend a voice to the voiceless, and we must do everything we can to protect and strengthen the ideals and principles that form the foundation of our democracy.

The future of our democracy depends on us speaking out.

It depends on us getting involved.

It depends on each and every one of us in this room doing our small part to protect and defend this great nation.

This is not hyperbole; this is reality.

It's not a scare tactic; it's a wake-up call.

Decisions are made by those who show up, which means complacency is complicity.

This is not the time for silence; this is the time for action.

We are literally—and figuratively—all in this together.

Or to put it another way—"e pluribus unum"—our nation's motto, which means, "out of many—one."

Some of us were born in the United States. Other families, like mine, came to this country in search of a better life.

We may speak different languages, call our God by different names, or belong to different political parties or no party at all—but we all love this country and the ideals for which it stands.

Liberty and equality.

Hard work and opportunity.

Individual accountability and community responsibility.

Freedom and fairness.

Hope and faith.

It is these ideals and principles that make America great—and special. And, it's what inspired President Reagan to describe America as a shining city on a hill; a beacon to all those who flee tyranny and persecution in search of a better life.

This is what makes America great. We must never lose sight of our founding principles, and we must never waver from our journey toward becoming a more perfect union.

The day we stop that journey . . . is the day America stops being great.

On a more personal note, the generosity and greatness of America is what brought my family and me to this country nearly 40 years ago.

As you may know, I was born in Vietnam right after Saigon fell in the Vietnam War.

At that time, the Communist government was rounding up hundreds of thousands of people associated with the former government of South Vietnam to send them to “re-education camps” where they endured torture, starvation, and disease while being forced to perform hard labor.

So, when I was an infant, my family, along with hundreds of thousands of families, fled Communist-controlled Vietnam—mostly by boat—to escape persecution, seek refuge, and find a better life for their families.

It was a treacherous journey and many didn’t make it. However, a U.S. Navy vessel discovered our small boat adrift at sea.

Out of the kindness of their hearts—and representing the generosity of America—those sailors refueled and resupplied us, and pointed us to Malaysia, where we made it the safety of a refugee camp.

Fortunately, my family only stayed a few months before a Lutheran Church sponsored our passage to the United States. Once in America, they helped us find housing and helped my parents find jobs—and we became proud American citizens.

Today, I stand before you as a refugee, an immigrant, a proud American, the first woman in my family to graduate college, and the first Vietnamese-American woman ever to serve in Congress.

My patriotism does not just come from reading eloquent words on a page or listening to soaring lyrics in an anthem.

Rather, it is deeply rooted in the generosity and grace that were bestowed upon my family and me—first by American service members and then by Americans of faith who demonstrated their love for God through the performance of good deeds here on earth.

Our discovery and rescue was certainly a moment of providence, but it was also a demonstration of how great America is.

I am a direct recipient of America’s greatness, just like most of you are in your own way. And I am eternally grateful for the opportunities I have received.

As parents, we believe it is our responsibility to give our children a better life than we had. As Americans, we believe it is our duty to protect and expand the opportunities we had for the next generation.

That’s why I work hard every day in Congress to protect and strengthen all that makes America great.

And that’s why I’m so proud to stand with you all today as we do the same here in central Florida.

The ideals that Dr. King espoused and the future he envisioned define the greatness of our nation and should inspire each of us to work harder in defense of our democracy.

By working together—across different faiths and political ideologies—we can rededicate ourselves to the purpose of unity, strengthen our commitment to opportunity for all, and resolve to love one another—motivated by hope and guided by faith.

After all, it was Dr. King who so plainly described our current situation: “We may have all come on different ships, but we’re in the same boat now.”

Thank you. May God bless you all, this community, and may He continue to bless this great nation.